

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An electronic document management system for verifying the contents of an electronic document exchanged through a network and comprising variable data input by a user, said system comprising:

- (a) a data capturing component for capturing data defining an electronic document, wherein said data comprises at least said variable data, and forwarding said data for storage;
- (b) a document digest generator for generating a digest from said defined electronic document by applying a secure algorithm thereto, whereby said digest is uniquely associated with said defined electronic document, and forwarding said digest for storage in association with said defined electronic document;
- (c) a barcode generator for generating a barcode from said generated digest whereby said barcode uniquely identifies said defined electronic document and the contents thereof;
- (d) a document forwarding component for forwarding said defined electronic document with said barcode added thereto for use by a user;
- (e) a document receiving component for receiving from a user a signed electronic document comprising variable data and a barcode; and,
- (f) a barcode verification component for determining the validity of said barcode of said received electronic document wherein a digest component of said barcode is compared to said stored digest associated with said defined electronic document.

2. An electronic document management system according to claim 1 wherein a unique document number is generated for said defined electronic document, said document number is stored with said captured data and said digest is generated from said defined electronic document and said document number.

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3. An electronic document management system according to claim 2 wherein said user inputs said variable data into a pre-determined electronic form template and said data defining said electronic document comprises said variable data and said pre-determined electronic form template.

4. An electronic document management system according to claim 3 wherein a unique document revision number is generated for said defined electronic document, said document revision number is stored with said captured data and said digest is generated from said defined electronic document and said document and revision numbers.

5. An electronic document management system according to claim 4 wherein a unique barcode for each page of said defined electronic document is generated by said barcode generator from said digest, said document and revision numbers and paging details for said defined electronic document and each said unique barcode is added to the specific page of said defined electronic document associated therewith, wherein the resulting barcoded defined electronic document is forwarded by said document forwarding component.

6. An electronic document management system according to claim 5 and further comprising a document image generator for generating an electronic image of said barcoded defined electronic document, wherein said document forwarding component forwards said electronic image.

7. An electronic document management system according to claim 6 wherein said received electronic document has been hand-signed and faxed by said user.

8. An electronic document management system according to claim 6 and further comprising a digital exchange key generator for generating a unique digital exchange key associated with said defined electronic document, said generated unique digital

exchange key being generated by applying said secure algorithm to said electronic image, and forwarding said digital exchange key for storage.

9. An electronic document management system according to claim 8 wherein said electronic document received by said document receiving component comprises a digital signature and said system further comprises a digital signature authentication component for authenticating said digital signature and a digital exchange key verification component for determining the validity of said received electronic document, wherein said digital exchange key verification component determines a digital exchange key by applying said secure algorithm to said received electronic document and comparing said determined digital exchange key to said stored unique digital exchange key associated with said defined electronic document.

10. A method for managing and verifying the contents of an electronic document exchanged through a network and comprising variable data input by a user, said method comprising:

- (a) capturing data defining an electronic document, whereby said data comprises at least said variable data, and forwarding said data for storage;
- (b) generating a digest from said defined electronic document by applying a secure algorithm thereto whereby said digest is uniquely associated with said defined electronic document, and forwarding said digest for storage in association with said defined electronic document;
- (c) generating a barcode from said generated digest whereby said barcode uniquely identifies said defined electronic document and the contents thereof;
- (d) forwarding said defined electronic document with said barcode added thereto for use by a user;
- (e) receiving from a user a signed electronic document comprising variable data and a barcode; and,

- (f) determining the validity of said barcode of a document received by said document receiving component wherein a digest component of said barcode is compared to said stored digest associated with said defined electronic document.

11. A method according to claim 10 whereby said user inputs said variable data into a pre-determined electronic form template and said data defining said electronic document comprises said variable data and said pre-determined electronic form template.

12. A method according to claim 11 and further comprising generating a unique document number for said defined electronic document and forwarding said document number for storage with said captured data, whereby said digest is generated from said defined electronic document and said document number.

13. A method according to claim 12 and further comprising generating a unique document revision number for said defined electronic document and forwarding said document revision number for storage with said captured data, whereby said digest is generated from said defined electronic document and said document and revision numbers.

14. A method according to claim 13 and further comprising generating a unique barcode for each page of said defined electronic document from said digest, said document and revision numbers and paging details for said defined electronic document, adding each said unique barcode to the specific page of said defined electronic document which is associated therewith and forwarding the resulting barcoded defined electronic document for use by a user.

15. A method according to claim 14 and further comprising generating an

electronic image of said barcoded defined electronic document and forwarding said image for use by a user.

16. A method according to claim 15 and further comprising generating a unique digital exchange key associated with said defined electronic document by applying said secure algorithm to said electronic image and forwarding said digital exchange key for storage.

17. A method according to claim 16 whereby said electronic document received by said document receiving component comprises a digital signature, said method further comprising:

- (a) authenticating said digital signature; and,
- (b) determining the validity of said received electronic document by applying said secure algorithm to said received electronic document and comparing the resulting determined digital exchange key to said stored unique digital exchange key associated with said defined electronic document.

18. A method according to claim 15 whereby said received electronic document has been hand-signed and faxed by said user.